

ELPA survey on national policies for screening for Hepatitis B and C in the European Union

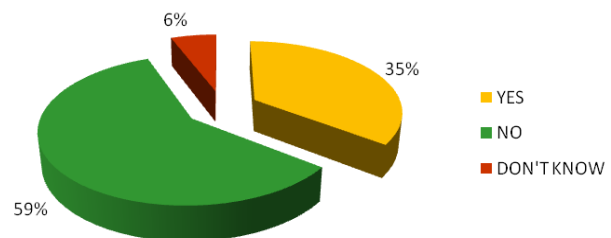
The survey was conducted amongst ELPA members in autumn 2008. The results came from 21 organisations representing 17 countries: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Spain and United Kingdom.

In the majority of the countries surveyed, national governments never conducted any sort of awareness campaigns on Hepatitis B and/or C.

Only Croatia, Egypt, France, Spain, and United Kingdom have conducted some sort of awareness campaign:

- In *Croatia* spots on TV and jingles on radio stations, billboards, posters in hospitals and public places; radio and TV interviews with specialists and patients, organized testing for free;
- In *Egypt*, a campaign just started this year by some media activities in radio and news papers but does not reach to the level required yet;
- In *Spain*, information campaign on radio and television about disease and its treatment. Campaign to promote early detection and persuade people to get tested. Videos in public transport, posters in addition World Hepatitis Day and scientific days;
- In the *UK*, on Hepatitis C only: initially a PR campaign getting stories/articles into the media; then an advertising campaign using national print media and radio (no TV) to persuade people to get tested; a DVD aimed at prisoners; a CD aimed at the South Asian population (which has high prevalence)

Has your government ever conducted specific awareness campaigns on Hepatitis B and/or C?

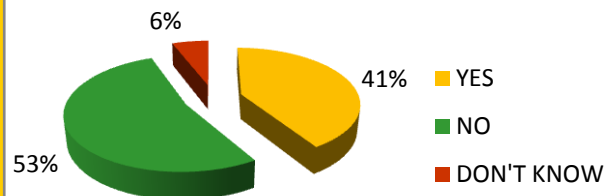


However, in many countries there are examples of awareness raising campaigns on specific diseases that have been particularly successful.

- In the *UK*, a very high profile HIV/AIDS campaign in the 1980s involved shocking TV ads and leaflets mailed to every single household in the UK;
- In *Poland*, campaign on breast cancer, with free mammographies, lots of information in all the possible media;
- In *Germany*, a vaccination campaign against poliomyelitis in the 1970's: „Schluckimpfung ist süß, Kinderlähmung ist bitter.“ (“Vaccination is sweet, Poliomyelitis is bitter”).

Only a handful of countries had developed a comprehensive national plan to fight Hepatitis. In the EU, these countries are France, the Netherlands, Scotland and England, and Sweden.

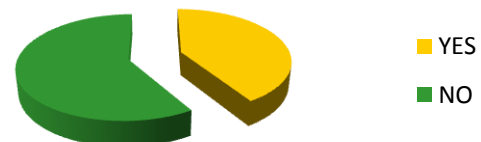
Is there a national plan in place in your country to fight Hepatitis B/C?



In the majority of the countries surveyed, waiting list for treatment does not seem to be an issue. However, the following problems have been highlighted:

- In *Poland*, around 3000 patients per year are treated, but 6000 are waiting for the treatment. The waiting time for the therapy is between 1-2 years.
- In *Bulgaria*, according to non-official information, number of patients waiting for treatment for chronic hepatitis C is over 250 and it's being renovated every year. There is a non official waiting list for chronic hepatitis B in Bulgaria, but there are over 200 patients waiting for treatment, and the waiting time is about one year.
- In *Sweden*, if there is a waiting time it depends on the hospitals budgets, but usually there is a waiting time of six to twelve months.

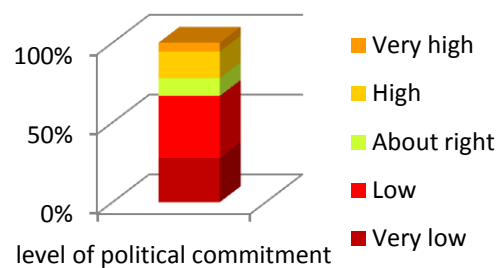
Are there waiting lists for treatment in your country?



Key conclusions

- Whilst reimbursement and access to treatment is not an issue for a majority of our members, the insufficient awareness of the public, healthcare professionals and policymakers is very much so.
- Most of the patients' organisations (59%) notice a lack of any incentives for healthcare professionals to conduct hepatitis tests.
- 75% of our members rate the political commitment with regards to Hepatitis as either low or very low.
- In 63% of the countries there has never been a public awareness campaign on the issue of Hepatitis.
- This low public and political awareness means patients are frequently diagnosed too late. In some countries as little as 10% of hepatitis patients are aware of their infections.

Overall, how would you rate the level of political commitment in your country to the fight against Hepatitis B and C?



Recommendations

ELPA members made a number of suggestions on what should be done in each country to improve the situation:

- in *Germany*, risk groups should be offered monitoring for hepatitis B and C
- In the *UK*, a better public awareness campaign together with much more effort to educate GPs and reimburse them for 'case-finding'
- In *Bulgaria*, creating a National program for free testing/ screening for chronic viral hepatitis in Bulgaria; allow general practitioners to be able to appoint hepatitis screening that is going to be reimbursed by the government; obligatory tests for Hepatitis B and C every year for risk groups
- In *Italy*, insert hepatitis and liver disease inside the priorities listed in the National Health plan; sensitise local regions to implement screening activity
- In *Sweden*, there is need a broad country-wide information campaign
- In *Spain*, more and intensive public awareness campaigns and more control by the general practitioners of their patients
- In *Poland*, what is needed is more information, more education, more awareness campaigns, better contact with people from risk groups, easier access to the diagnosis, and reimbursement of all the tests for HBV / HCV
- In *Slovakia*, a national program of prevention of HBV/HCV should elaborated and put into action